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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000389

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL GB

SUBJECT: GABON: ELECTION MISCELLANY II

REF: 09 LIBREVILLE 00368

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Rediick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The jockeying for position and desire for votes by the candidates of the Gabonese presidency has steadily risen in intensity. Bruno Ben Moubamba, an independent candidate, is in the sixth day of a hunger strike to protest irregularities regarding the Constitutional Court and electoral lists. Ominously, Andre Mba Obame, also an independent, has begun to experiment with anti-Muslim rhetoric in his campaign speeches. The PDG, in an effort to close ranks, formally ejected former members now running as independent candidates as well as dismissed current members for insufficient support of the PDG's candidate, Ali Bongo Ondimba. END SUMMARY.

BRUNO BEN ON A HUNGER STRIKE

¶2. (U) Bruno Ben Moubamba, one of the 23 candidates for the Presidency, began a hunger strike on August 15 in front of the National Assembly. Moubamba is protesting alleged illegalities surrounding the upcoming election) specifically that the revision of the electoral list was performed too quickly to be reliable, and the President of the Constitutional Court Madeleine Mborantsuo violated article 89 of the constitution by not stepping down when her 7 year term expired in the last two months. Moubamba is demanding that the Constitutional Court reopen the inscriptions of the electoral list and remove Mborantsuo from the Constitutional Court. Moubamba chose the front of the National Assembly for his hunger strike in order to gain attention from the local and international press. Moubamba is visibly weakened from his hunger strike, though he has consumed water and sugar in order to grant interviews.

MBA OBAME BEGINS ANTI-MUSLIM RHETORIC

¶3. (C) During a meeting in the Okala neighborhood of Libreville on August 15 presidential candidate Andre Mba Obame asked Muslims in Gabon to "abstain" from voting in the upcoming election. In response, the gathered crowd then began chanting slogans that included "burn down the mosques."

The High Islamic Council of Gabon issued a televised statement denouncing the comments by Mba Obame and the crowd's reaction and asked Mba Obame to review his platform to try to avoid creating religious tensions. On August 20, during a televised presidential debate, Mba Obame repeatedly avoided the topic of religion and his previous statements about Muslims, but also refused to retract the statements. Besides trying to create and then capitalize on religious

tensions, Mba Obame's statements regarding Muslims are trying to draw a connection to Gabonese fears that resident aliens will be able to illegally vote and skew the results. The Muslim community in Gabon is composed largely of non-Gabonese (especially West Africans) who now reside here.

PDG CLOSES RANKS

¶4. (U) Throughout the week of August 19 the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) dismissed several important members of the party because of insufficient loyalty to the PDG's candidate Ali Bongo Ondimba. Current independent candidates that were former PDG members like Jean Eyeghe Ndong, Andre Mba Obame and Casimir Oye Mba were officially ejected from the PDG's rosters. The PDG also dismissed a number of less-prominent members of the party who had connections to or were openly supporting candidates other than Ali Bongo. The PDG claims the demissions were due to the "non-respect" of the rules of the party.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The use of anti-Muslim rhetoric by Andre Mba Obame is a disturbing development in a campaign that, thus far, has lacked any meaningful religious or ethnic tensions. Gabon is largely Christian and Mba Obame's tactic for enflaming religious fault-lines has not taken hold. It does suggest that Mba Obame realizes his push for the presidency is

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weakening and has begun to search for other ways to gather supporters for his candidacy. The PDG's demission of the non-supporters of Ali Bongo was expected. In fact, we are a little surprised it took the party this long to formally eject the independent candidates and their supporters. Moubamba, who is a marginal candidate at best, is gaining reasonable coverage in the media for his hunger strike though it is unlikely it will lead to a boost to his candidacy or a delay in the election. We are seeking further information about Mborantsuo's term of office, but do not believe that there will be any serious challenge to her seat at the head of the key institution that may be called upon to decide Gabon's future president. END COMMENT.
REDDICK